



WebRTC and the Future of Interactive Video Everywhere

A new technology is arriving called WebRTC (*Web Real Time Communication*), and all distance learning users should begin to pay attention to it. WebRTC is an emerging Standard that enables users to make voice and video calls through Web browsers without needing to implement a multimedia client or plugin. WebRTC holds the promise of making real-time interactive video on the web ubiquitous, truly easy to use, and cheap(er) or even free, enriching all DL applications. But what does that mean for distance learning?



A lot, it seems. Greater participation and adoption is a certainty. A farewell to the necessity of grant funding to initiate interactive video distance learning (in every classroom) is another outcome. Greater utility and ease of use is a third certain outcome. Longer term, look for WebRTC capabilities in every browser-capable device.

So, what's the catch? The catch is that it is still early days for the full promise of WebRTC, but not too early for users to develop an awareness of WebRTC and to play with early variants to discover new uses. It is also not too early to pay attention to vendors currently in use in distance learning and watch how they begin to accommodate WebRTC enabled capabilities into their offerings.

The WebRTC initiative is a project currently supported by Google, Mozilla (Firefox) and Opera browsers, including mobile variants. It is not yet supported by Microsoft Explorer or Apple Safari, each from vendors with major stakes in preserving their own proprietary video communication interests – Microsoft with Lync and Skype, and Apple with Appletalk. However, the future is likely to see these and other vendors (Adobe Acrobat and Cisco Webex, for examples, as well as the proliferating cloud-based meet-me video conferencing services) accommodate or even discover valuable extensions to their products through the WebRTC enabled environment.

But WebRTC is not just about Distance Learning. WebRTC development will be driven by enterprise (business) communication uses and by innovative consumer retail sites on the web.

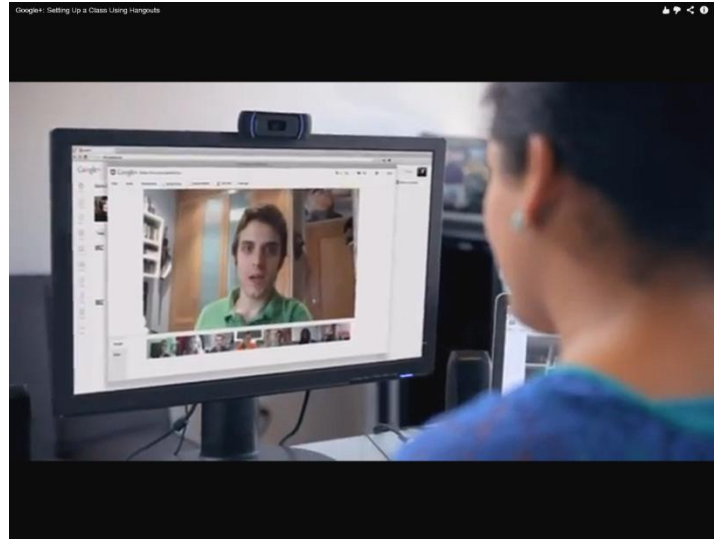
(Illustration taken from the project's VidTel virtual room WebRTC beta site; <http://www.vidtel.com/>)

Free Distance Learning Experience - Google Hangouts for Education

WebRTC is emerging from the experience Google has had with providing video communication via its Googletalk, Google + Hangout and other services, all of which are currently available, with some support for use, to teachers, administrators, and students at all levels – and is free.

Distance learning class support, student video study groups, wide-area teacher best practice sharing groups – anything is possible in the current capabilities of Google Hangouts for Education, and more is becoming possible every day. Anyone who wants to play and learn more about what is possible in distance education can take advantage of this multi-featured Google tool set.

In addition to interactive video with multiple sites, Google Hangouts provide screen and document sharing capability, live streaming, and recording and saving of sessions.



The downside of this rapidly developing distance learning environment is that it is difficult to provide up-to-date how-to documentation and training materials for new and would-be users. Much is out there in both article form and demonstration videos. However, wider use simply requires initiative, practice and experimentation by new users. Take a look. Below is a good recent article.

How Educators and Schools Can Make the Most of Google Hangouts (Edutopia 2/1/13)

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/educators-schools-google-hangouts-mary-beth-hertz>

Featured Videos:

The Dream of Centralized Shared Resource Access – eNetColorado

There are many things in Colorado K12 education that need greater awareness, participation and use, but perhaps none as remarkable as The eNetColorado Digital Resource and Exchange Marketplace (DREAM; <http://www.enetcolorado.org/dream/>), a common statewide platform for digital resource sharing. Below are links to videos that explain DREAM and provide an example of how it is being used at EC BOCES, along with an overview of eNetColorado itself.

- eNetColorado DREAM Overview: <http://vimeo.com/41206303>
- East Central BOCES project video: <http://vimeo.com/47063982>
- eNetColorado Overview video: <http://vimeo.com/26981026>

For more information on DREAM, contact Dan Morris at danmorris@enetcolorado.org.